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AUTHOR Smith, Craig Allen
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ABSTRACT

Conventional wisdom holds that the right-wing John Birch Society disintegrated during the late 1960s. An examination of the society's periodical readership indicates that it has, instead, expanded. Moreover, this expansion occurred during a period of ideological dissonance for the organization, a fact that undermines confidence in the explanation for Birchist appeal that sees the society as providing a protective, closed belief system for its members. Psychological explanations of the authoritarian character structure does, however, provide an explanation for this trend. An examination of "The Blue Book of the John Birch Society," a transcription of Robert Welch's addresses at the society's founding in 1958, reveals that the society epitomizes the three characteristics of classical authoritarianism--a view of the world as jungle, a tendency toward hierarchy, and a sadomasochistic tendency. Consequently, Birch doctrine functions psychologically for the authoritarian types most desirable for organization purposes while alienating potentially troublesome democratic characters. In this way, the society accomplishes its recruitment, consolidation, and confrontation with one rhetorical approach. (Author/JL)

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THE AUTHORITARIAN CHARACTER OF THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY:

THE FUNCTIONAL UTILITY OF ALARMIST DISCOURSE

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Craig Allen Smith
Department of Speech-Communication
The University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill

Presented at the Annual Meeting of the
Southern Speech Communication Association
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Abstract

Conventional wisdom holds that the right-wing John Birch Society disintegrated during the latter 1960's. An examination of the Society's periodical readership indicates that it has, instead, expanded. Moreover, this expansion occurred during a period of ideological dissonance, thus undermining our confidence in the "closed-mindedness" explanation for Birchist appeal. This essay attempts to demonstrate that Birch doctrine epitomizes the three characteristics of classical authoritarianism -- a view of the world as jungle, a tendency toward hierarchy, and a sado-masochistic tendency. Consequently, Birch doctrine functions psychologically for the authoritarian types most desirable for organizational purposes while alienating potentially troublesome democratic characters. It suggests that the Society accomplishes its recruitment, consolidation, and confrontation with this one rhetorical approach.

THE AUTHORITARIAN CHARACTER OF THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY: THE FUNCTIONAL UTILITY OF ALARMIST DISCOURSE

There is widespread agreement among students of social movement rhetoric as to the importance of recruitment and consolidation. Without recruitment there are no members, and without consolidation the members do not constitute a collectivity.[1]

This essay will explicate the means by which one organization, Robert Welch's John Birch Society, selectively recruits those adherants best suited to its organizational efforts while simulataneously excluding potential mutineers. I will argue specifically that personality or character type and message are interdependent, and that Birchist rhetoric provides psychological (rather than primarily political, social, or philosophical) gratifications to those of "authoritarian character" while alienating those of "democratic character."

1

The John Birch Society was founded in 1958 as a secret, activist anti-Communist organization by Robert H. W. Welch. Welch, a retired candy executive and former head of the National Association of Manufacturers, wanted a cadre of dedicated and disciplined patriots who would help him take America back from the Communists. Importantly, he did not desire a large organization (large organizations being difficult to discipline).[2]

Conventional wisdom holds that the John Birch Society disintegrated in the mid-1960's as a consequence of two events.

The first of these was the Goldwater debacle of 1964 -- a campaign in which the Birch Society was quite active and visible. The second was the belief dilemma posed for Birchers by the anti-war movement of the 1960's. Having themselves opposed the Vietnam War as an effort by American Communists to squander our resources, and having opposed protesters of virtually all political stripes as Communist-inspired, the Birch Society faced a ticklish rhetorical task.[3] The Birch Society's visibility diminished, and public and scholars alike inferred that it had become insignificant.

But far from disbanding in the mid-1960's, the John Birch Society continued to grow. This is evident in the circulation data for two publications -- The John Birch Society Bulletin (the members-only monthly), and American Opinion (Welch's general circulation monthly). The average readership of American Opinion during the 1963-65 "peak" reached 29,190 as compared to 29,361 for the period 1979-81. More importantly, the number of mailed subscriptions (reflecting those committed readers willing to maintain a continuing subscription) has actually risen by 50% -- from 15,218 during the 1963-65 "peak" to 22,893 in 1979-81. Furthermore, American Opinion did not reach its average annual circulation (for the period 1958-81) until 1966 for general circulation, and 1971 for mailed subscriptions. Finally, the mailed circulation of the Bulletin (available only to members and some libraries) averaged 61,073 for the period 1976-81 and reached 107,776 in 1981 -- more than any known estimate of the Society's "peak" membership.[4]

These circulation data strongly suggest that the John Birch Society did not disintegrate in 1966 -- it simply became less public. Unfortunately, most scholars mistook visibility for vitality -- hardly appropriate for secret organizations -- and ceased to study the Society. But if the John Birch Society has been invisible and ignored for fifteen years, why did 107,000 Americans last year pay to have the Bulletin mailed to them? The Society deserves renewed critical attention.

3

This is not the first attempt at ascertaining the John Birch Society's appeal. Dale Leathers, the most insightful critic of Birch rhetoric, argued that the Birch ideology exhibits the characteristics of a closed belief system, thereby providing members with a protective belief system.[5] While his case has much merit, there are two reasons for seeking another explanation.

The first reason is the lack of ideological satisfaction found among Birchers during their purported peak activity in 1964-65. In a survey of members, conducted with the assistance of Birch headquarters, Fred W. Grupp found that while 61% joined the Society for "ideological reasons," only 19% reported satisfaction -- nevertheless they remained in the Society.[6] Rokeach's, and hence Leathers's, formulation of closed-mindedness suggests that dysfunctionality should lead frustrated closed-minds to seek an alternative belief system. Those Birchers surveyed by Grupp apparently did not.

The second reason for modifying Leathers's explanation derives from the aforementioned anti-war belief dilemma.

Stephen Earl Bennett traced the Birch Society's strategies of denial, differentiation, bolstering, and transcendence to reconcile their position on the war with their strange bedfellows.[7] The persistence of this belief dilemma through 1966 should have caused defection from the ranks of the Society, as the closed belief system functioned inefficiently. Instead, readership of American Opinion increased from 25,761 in the Goldwater year of 1964 to 35,400 in 1965 and 43,262 in 1966 during the two-year belief dilemma. Moreover, this readership declined to 37,835 in 1967 after the dilemma had been resolved. The Leathers-Rokeach framework would suggest precisely opposite circulation trends.

In light of the foregoing, it seems ill-advised to explain the Birch Society's appeal through the concept of closed belief systems. Yet Leathers's case is otherwise quite convincing. His analysis derives from Milton Rokeach's efforts to discover the nature of "topic-free" authoritarianism.[8] But Rokeach's work was the culmination of a much longer interest in authoritarianism. This earlier research, conducted most notably by Abraham Maslow, Erich Fromm, and Theodor Adorno and his colleagues at California, emphasized rightist authoritarianism for the better understanding of Nazi sympathizers.[9] While their work was later criticized by Rokeach and others for its political bias, that bias is only pertinent when attempting to understand leftist and moderate authoritarians -- their pioneering work should be quite helpful to students of rightist movements. Let us turn, then, to a brief overview of their work.

Psychological study of the "authoritarian character structure" was based primarily upon clinical observation, until Adorno et al presented their California F Scale in 1950. This early work was directed at understanding rightist authoritarianism and is pertinent to an understanding of the Birch Society. While no single symptom signifies authoritarianism, there are three major characteristics: a view of the world as a threatening place, a tendency toward hierarchy, and a tendency toward sado-masochism.[10]

The World as Jungle

The fundamental premise of the authoritarian worldview is that life is essentially threatening. Maslow explained that:

> Like other psychologically insecure people, the authoritarian person lives in a world which may be conceived to be pictured by him as a sort of jungle in which every man's hand is necessarily against every other man's, in which the whole world is conceived of as dangerous, threatening, or at least challenging, and in which human beings are conceived of as primarily selfish or evil or stupid...This jungle is peopled with animals who either eat or are eaten, who are either feared or despised. One's safety lies in one's own strength and this strength consists primarily in the power to dominate. If one is not strong enough the only alternative is to find a strong protector.[11]

Since danger is all around, the protector can and will demand total obedience. And since the protected must sustain the relationship with the protector, submission is willing and often ecstatic (when the danger is keenly felt). Within this jungle, then, the protector-protected relationship predominates.

To the extent that the world really is a jungle the authoritarian's worldview is advisable. It is foolish to wander off from the safari to negotiate with lions and tigers. Authoritarians therefore express only contempt for those who fail to recognize that the world is threatening.

The Tendency Toward Hierarchy

In the jungle all creatures compete relentlessly and unmercifully for the means of survival. Every creature must therefore be quickly categorized as "superior" (and thus "to be feared, resented, bootlicked, and admired") or as "inferior" (and therefore "to be scorned, humiliated, and dominated").[12] Time is precious in the jungle since anyone slow to recognize the enemy cannot long survive. Thus everyone must be easily ranked in a hierarchy from strong to weak.

Importantly, the authoritarian's antithesis has no such tendency. Maslow's "Democratic Character" tends to see the world as a basically friendly, supportive place -- more greenhouse than jungle. Democratic character types view people as simply different from one another, with such differences being horizontal rather than vertical.[13]

But the authoritarian sees all differences among people as vertical. Since unity is essential for survival the authoritarian can tolerate neither diverse goals nor diverse means. All people, achievements, and events are measured on one scale various authoritarians may stress different scales, but none can stress tolerance or diversity. This is so because multiple scales confound the process of ranking everyone on a superior-inferior scale, thus enhancing the danger to all.

The person judged superior is therefore judged universally superior, while the inferior is likewise universally inferior. But the democratic character judges superiority-inferiority more particularly in specific or functional terms. The authoritarian assigns holistic superiority while the democrat appraises specific capabilities, functions, and performances.

Since these judgments of superiority must be made quickly, and since superiority is inherently generalizable, the authoritarian judges by externals. These may include titles, behaviors, appearance, family name, or wealth. This is a useful means of adjudication precisely because a superior is consistently so. Conversely, the democratic personality prefers to judge others (when judge one must) on the basis of performance. As Maslow explained:

> He (sic) customarily gives his permanent respect only to people who are worthy of respect for functional reasons. He doesn't give his respect automatically simply because he is supposed to, or because everybody else respects this person.[14]

But the authoritarian does precisely this.

In short, external characteristics are noted by the authoritarian, adjudicated against the single vertical scale, and generalized to ascertain the person's superiority-inferiority preliminary to establishing a leader-follower relationship. The democratic character examines functional characteristics, adjudicates them (only as necessary) according to diverse values and creates a leader-follower relationship (when necessary) for the attainment of some specific goal.

The Sado-Masochistic Tendency

Given the foregoing context for the leader-follower relationship, the authoritarian naturally believes that any leader's kindness is a weakness. Maslow explained that:

> If he (sic) is in dominance status, he will tend to be cruel; if he is in subordinate status, he will tend to be masochistic. But because of the tendencies in himself, he will understand, and deep down within himself will agree with the cruelty of the superior person, even if he himself is the object of the cruelty. He will understand the bootlicker and the slave even if he himself is not the bootlicker or the slave. The same principles explain both the leader and the follower in an authoritarian group, both the slave-owner and the slave.[15]

Significantly, then, the follower glories in subservience to the leader. This relationship and the generalization of superiority-inferiority preclude negotiation of control since neither party finds such negotiations either valid or satisfactory. Both realize that the worthless inferior is fortunate to have the protector, and both realize that the protector should feel little beyond contempt for the follower.

Since the authoritarian sees people as fundamentally selfish, evil, stupid, and unable to survive alone, inferiors are to be used as the superior sees fit. Other people are "tools" or "pawns on a chessboard" and may even be seen as sub-human. The democratic character views humans as partners rather than rivals and is hence reluctant to use or manipulate them.[16]

This sado-masochistic tendency leads to an authoritarian value system in which brutality, cruelty, selfishness, and hardness are exalted and in which sympathy, kindness, and generosity are reviled by leaders and followers alike.[17]

Importantly, the democratic character has no comparable tendency. There is room for selfishness and generosity, for hardness and compassion, since people value differently.

Other Characteristics

Maslow lists several other characteristics of authoritarianism which deserve passing attention. These include an "abyss between men and women," (men being purportedly better able to survive through strength), the soldier ideal, the importance of humiliation as a mechanism for establishing superiority, antagonism toward the education of inferiors, avoidance of responsibility for one's own fate, and the pursuit of security through order, discipline, and other compulsive-obsessive outlets.[18]

Underlying these characteristics is the impossibility of authoritarian satisfaction. The best one can hope to accomplish is temporary relief. But the jungle is, after all, dangerous. And one must be most vigilant when the jungle seems safest. The democratic character can be happier for longer since his or her basic needs have been satisfied and danger -- not safety -- is the exception.[19]

Before moving to an examination of the authoritarian character of Birchist rhetoric we must observe with Maslow that the authoritarian character is a construction of internally consistent beliefs or tendencies, all of which revolve around the premise that the world is a very threatening, dangerous place. To the extent that it is so (and only to that extent) the authoritarian is better able to deal with it than is the democratic character.

Implicit in the authoritarian character is the need for communication. Maslow's description of survival is social or interpersonal. The inferior is doomed unless he or she can enlist and sustain the assistance of a sufficiently strong protector. The rhetorical process through which this help is enlisted is central to the authoritarian's psychological survival. The central arguments of the John Birch Society provide for all of the psychological needs of the authoritarian character while alienating those of democratic character.[20] These central arguments are found in The Blue Book of the John Birch Society -- a transcription of Welch's addresses at the Society's 1958 founding -- which remains the Society's formal ideological statement. By analyzing this core ideology for signs of authoritarian leader-follower imagery, I hope to demonstrate that the Society is built around its leader first and its closed beliefs (identified by Leathers) secondarily. This would enable the leader to reconcile subsequent belief dilemmas for his followers.

The Birchist World as Jungle

The theme of the Blue Book is the danger of subversive Communism. If people are not aroused to that danger, says Welch, "in a few short years we shall all be hanging from the same lamp posts while Communist terror reigns all around us."[21] He proceeds to tell the reader that:

> the truth I bring you is simple, incontrovertible and deadly. It is that, unless we can reverse forces which now seem inexorable in their movement, you have only

> a few more years before the country in which you live will become separate provinces in a world-wide Communist dominion ruled by police-state methods from the Kremlin.[22]

But unlike most Americans during the 1950's, Welch did not perceive the danger as Soviet aggression or nuclear war.

Instead, Welch identified the danger of Communism as subversive. Lenin's strategy, he said, "is taking us over by a process so gradual and insidious that Soviet rule is slipped over so far on the American people, before they ever realize it is happening, that they can no longer resist the Communist conspiracy as free citizens."[23]

This subversion comes from, "a gigantic conspiracy to enslave mankind; an increasingly successful conspiracy controlled by determined, cunning, and utterly ruthless gangsters, willing to go to any means to achieve its end."[24] These conspirators are "like an octopus so large that its tentacles now reach into all of the legislative halls, all of the union labor meetings, a majority of the religious gatherings, and most of the schools <u>of the whole world</u>."[25] Indeed, Welch warns:

> The human race has never before faced any such monster of power which has determined to enslave it. There is certainly no reason for underrating its size, its efficiency, its determination, its power, or its menace.[26]

The John Birch Society's world is not a friendly place.

The worldview of the Birch Society stresses constant, imminent, hidden, ruthless danger. It is probably difficult for anyone to read much of their material without experiencing some sense of duress. But each of us reacts to such duress

differently. While the prototypical democrat rejects the argument's central premise, the authoritarian is inclined to recognize it and read on. Having accepted the premise that an illusive, dangerous conspiracy is afoot the authoritarian must find a protector.

The Birch Tendency Toward Hierarchy

The authoritarian character of the Society's argument becomes more evident when we examine Welch's alternative to Communist enslavement. The democratic character would most likely prefer a cooperative effort based upon functional abilities, while the authoritarian would look for leadership and protection.

Welch dismisses democracy as "merely a deceptive phrase, a weapon of demagoguery, and a perennial fraud."[27] He observes that a republican form of government has "many attractions and advantages, under certain favorable circumstances...but it lends itself too readily to infiltration, distortion and disruption."[28] That leaves autocracy: "The John Birch Society is to be a monolithic body [which] will operate under completely authoritative control at all levels."[29] This autocratic structure is necessary since "no collection of debating societies is ever going to stop the Communist conspiracy from taking us over...and we mean business every step of the way."[30]

Welch's autocratic structure will not tolerate negotiations over control. The Society, he says, "cannot stop for parliamentary procedures or a lot of arguments among ourselves" because "we are now being more and more divided and deceived, by accepting within our walls more and more

Trojan horses."[31] Therefore, "we are not going to have factions developing on the two-sides-to-every-question theme."[32] Thus Welch is clear to offer his readers the prototypical authoritarian solution for danger -- a strict autocratic relationship.

But the Society's hierarchy is not simply Welch above the membership. He explains that the Society

> will function almost entirely through small local chapters, usually of from ten to twenty dedicated patriots... Each will have a Chapter Leader appointed by headquarters ...or appointed by officers in the field who have themselves been duly appointed by headquarters. (emphasis added)[33]

Welch's description of the Society's organizational structure emphasizes the danger of the world, a preference for clearly ordered hierarchy in which all authority flows down from the Belmont, Massachusetts headquarters to the local chapters, and intolerance for dissension and democracy. Even should a democratic character find Welch's alarmist worldview tempting, such a person would be psychologically incapable of joining the Birch Society because of its rigid, monolithic, autocratic structure. But an authoritarian tempted by the alarm would seek precisely this sort of autocracy for protection. Welch's organizational plan therefore meshes neatly with his alarm to entice the authoritarian and repel the democrat.

A second manifestation of the authoritarian tendency to hierarchy is the Society's generalization of superiority from external characteristics. The reader of the Blue Book

is introduced to the members of the Council, all 26 of whom are introduced positionally: a "Boston surgeon," a "worthy son of a famous 'free enterpriser' in the Northwest lumber industry," a "well-known and highly successful Texas businessman" and several corporate, religious, and military figures.[34] Not only does Welch fail to indicate the specific, functional relevance of their quite impressive credentials to an understanding of Communism or conspiracies (for the benefit of democratic characters), but he explicitly states that the primary purpose of the Council is "to show the stature and standing of the leadership of the Society."[35] Stature and standing are important to the authoritarian, but generally unimportant to the democrat. Again, the Council should attract authoritarians while avoiding the kind of appeal which would attract democrats.

In addition to stature, the John Birch Society tends to generalize superiority based upon one's willingness to acknowledge the danger and the solution -- in this case Birchism. Others are judged as followers, enemies, or naive helpless inferiors based upon their agreement with Welch. John Birch becomes the Society's martyr because he was killed by a Chinese Communist soldier during peace-time for non-cooperation.[36] Historian Oswald Spengler's work "fits the known facts of history" while Arnold Toynbee is a "meretricious hack...who is one of the worst charlatans that ever lived."[37] Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower all furthered the Communists' goals because Welch disagreed

with them.[38] Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan are applauded because they understand, William F. Buckley and Russel Kirk are chastised because they do not. This differentia functions to isolate members from the kind of two-sides-to-every-question controversy which Welch disdains. Metaphorically, anyone who fails to follow the safari leader endangers the whole safari. Yet one of democratic character who fears Communism might find some value in the thoughts of, say, Buckley or Kirk.[39] Welch thus appears to be stressing safety through autocracy rather than safety through conservatism. Let us then turn our attention to the nature of the autocratic relationship that he prescribes.

Birchist Sado-Masochism

The Blue Book is replete with references to Communist's sadistic treatment of their followers. We are told, for example, of the Communists' "police state features" which impose "brutal rule" and "slavery" upon "Party members who are wholly subservient."[40] This is important because "Communism has been imposed and must always be imposed, from the top down, by trickery and terror; and then it must be maintained by terror."[41] This terror is directed not only at the slaves but at recalcitrant Party members who "are shot in some dark alley or pushed off a subway platform in front of a moving train."[42] Given this dreadful picture of sadistic rule by the Communists, the democrat might reasonably expect Welch to offer an alternative of kindness

rather than brutality, cooperation rather than slavery, participation rather than subservience, and bottom-up rather than top-down organization.

But Welch's alternative to sadistic Communist domination is the Birch Society's organizational structure which mirrors the Communist monolith. The Society is ordered from top-down with members obeying official directives and subject to removal for non-compliance.[43] Indeed, Welch observes that:

> the biggest of all organizational mistakes is to set up a local group for some continuing purpose, exhort them to do a good job, and then leave them alone to do it. It is the leadership that is most demanding, most exacting of its followers not the one which asks the least and is afraid to ask more, that achieves really dedicated support.[44]

In true sado-masochistic fashion, Welch is here stressing (1) the leader's responsibility to push his selfish, lazy, and stupid followers to their limits, and (2) the followers' ecstatic submission to this exacting leadership. It is important here that Welch argues not only that such leadership is effective, but that it encourages "really dedicated support" (rather than defection or mutiny). These tendencies are unlike anything in the democratic character.

The Blue Book thus suggests supplanting Communist dominance with Welch's dominance until the quantity of goverment can be drastically reduced and a largely anarchistic polity created in which strength and protection determine survival.[45] This program functions psychologically for the authoritarian and is dysfunctional for the democrat (who prefers partnership). But the important point is that Welch's program parallels the psychological continuum of authoritarianism, not the political continuum of freedom through control.

A second manifestation of the Birch Society's sado-masochism is the pattern of gratifications afforded members for following Welch. Whereas the democrat would look for functional, practical benefits the authoritarian seeks submission to a protector. In this regard Welch announces that:

> The men (sic) who join the John Birch Society during the next few months or few years are going to be doing so primarily because they believe in me and what I am doing ... And we are going to use that personal loyalty, like every other resource, to the fullest advantage that we can.[46]

Even the criterion for continued membership is loyal submission: "Those members who cease to feel the necessary degree of loyalty can either resign or will be put out before they build up any splintering following of their own inside the Society."[47]

But on what basis is the potential Bircher expected to develop this deep personal loyalty to Welch? He explains his credentials as follows:

> with all my shortcomings, there wasn't anybody else on the horizon willing to give their whole lives to the job, with the determination and dedication I would put into it...Whatever I have in me, of faith, dedication, energy, I intend to offer that leadership to all who are willing to help me.[48]

Put simply, while others might have better functional skills for fighting Communists we should attach curselves to Robert Welch (and only to him) because he alone is obsessed with this safari.

Welch's demand for personal loyalty on the basis of his obsession is all the more startling when we recognize that his practical, functional credentials are quite impressive. But the reader of the Blue Book does not learn that Welch

studied at the University of North Carolina, the U. S. Naval Academy, and Harvard Law School; nor that he wrote a primer on salesmanship and served three years as President of the National Association of Manufacturers. These seemingly pertinent facts are not divulged until a short postscript to the second printing of the Blue Book.[49] The point here is that Welch, a master salesman, could have sold his leadership to democrats by stressing his expertise. Instead, he emphasized (whether intentionally or not) his energy, his commitment, his constant reading of Communist materials, and his willingness to exercise authority, dominance, and control -- a package which would be highly attractive to authoritarians.

Maslow explained that authoritarians revel in superior-inferior relationships. Inferiors know that they deserve to be controlled, while superiors find temporary satisfaction in the exercise of control. This theme pervades the Blue Book as Welch condemns the sadistic Communist control and offers his own control as the alternative. He sells the necessity for "dynamic, personal leadership" and personal loyalty based primarily upon his compulsive-obsessive efforts and his readiness to punish those of dubious loyalty rather than on the basis of his notable, and apparently relevant, credentials. Potential members are asked . to join the John Birch Society not because it will succeed, not because its tactics are well-conceived, not because they can participate in it and shape its direction; but because they want to be personally loyal to Robert Welch.

In summary, The Blue Book of the John Birch Society presents a dangerous, threatening world in which ruthless conspirators abound. It suggests a monolithic, autocratic organization built around members' personal loyalty to one man on the basis of his dedication and energy. This organization to combat totalitarianism will, however, tolerate neither discussion nor parliamentary procedure, and anyone quibbling with the leader will be expelled. Thus the John Birch Society may be said to exemplify all three major characteristics of the authoritarian character structure: a view of the world as a threatening place, a tendency toward hierarchy, and a sado-masochistic tendency.

Conclusions

This analysis of the John Birch Society and its central arguments suggests four conclusions. The first of these is that the John Birch Society is not, as measured by readership of their periodicals, a defunct organization. It is a secret, low-profile organization which does not provide its members with prominent political victories nor, according to Bennett, a dilemma-free closed belief system. Nevertheless, its membership has increased in recent years such that its periodicals were more widely read in 1979-81 than they were in the "peak" 1963-65 period. This increase, especially during the 1965-66 period, weakens Leathers's closed belief system thesis and encourages renewed critical attention to the Society.

Secondly, the Society's Blue Book depicts a threatening world and stresses the need for ecstatic submission to a dynamic, personal leader within an autocratic hierarchy --

a depiction congruent with the archetypal authoritarian character structure and antithetical to the democratic character structure. Through this happy coincidence, Robert Welch in one rhetorical stroke (1) recruits the ardent, dedicated followers he needs and wants, (2) alienates potentially troublesome democrats, and (3) consolidates his recruits into a band of loyalists who will (4) become more, not less, reliant on him during times of ideological dissonance.

Third, the psychological gratifications afforded by Welch to authoritarian characters permit his ironic (perhaps oxymoronic) arguments: the protection of freedom through dictatorial leadership, protection of capitalism through noncompetitive organization, and strength through submission. These arguments seem to require the authoritarian character's worldview for completion of the enthymeme.

If rhetoric serves the function of adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas -- as Donald C. Bryant has suggested -- then this study suggests an important path for future research. Welch's Blue Book message is quite clearly adjusted to an archetypal personality type. It is likely to appeal to authoritarian characters and, simultaneously, offend or alienate democratic characters. It excludes from membership those persons most likely to disrupt it, while gratifying the compulsive-obsessive workers who want to work diligently for a revered leader. The argument works for members so that the members will work for their leader. These gratifications offer a plausible explanation for the endurance of the Society during a period of declining visibility and political efficacy. We need to

ascertain whether the Birch experience is typical or anomalous in this regard.

Finally, this essay should have demonstrated that rhetorical functions do not bear a linear relationship to messages. It is possible for a leader to recruit, confront, and consolidate -- all in one message. Welch's Blue Book does precisely this. And whether Welch the salesman planned it that way or it simply reflects his own character, it seems clear that the John Birch Society's alarmist discourse is more than mere "paranoia" -- it works for them, and works well. Whether the Birch case is representative of the species deserves further scrutiny.

Notes

[1]See for example Herbert W. Simons, "Requirements, Problems, and Strategies: A Theory of Persuasion for Social Movements," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 56 (1970), 1-11; Bruce Gronbeck, "The Rhetoric of Social-Institutional Change: Black Action at Michigan," in Explorations in Rhetorical Criticism ed. G. P. Mohrmann, Charles J. Stewart, and Donovan J. Ochs (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1973), pp. 96-123; and Charles J. Stewart, "A Functional Approach to the Rhetoric of Social Movements," Central States Speech Journal, 31 (1980), 298-305.

[2]For background information on the John Birch Society, see J. Allen Broyles, The John Birch Society: Anatomy of a Protest (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), and two volumes published by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith which are Benjamin R. Epstein and Arnold Forster's Report on the John Birch Society, 1966 (New York: Random House, 1966) and The Radical Right: Report on the John Birch Society and Its Allies (New York: Random House, 1967), all three of which are unsympathetic to the group. A more balanced account is Gerald Schomp's, Birchism Was My Business (New York: Macmillan, 1970) which is an apologetic autobiographical account written by the Society's former head of public relations.

[3]Stephen Earl Bennett, "Modes of Resolution of a 'Belief Dilemma' in the Ideology of the John Birch Society," Journal of Politics, 33 (1971), 735-772.

[4]Circulation data as published in accordance with federal statute in December issues of these publications. Circulation is the best index of Society membership since their rolls remain secret and their primary activities are educative in nature. Circulation for the Bulletin was not published prior to 1976.

[5]Dale Leathers, "Belief-Disbelief Systems: The Communicative Vacuum of the Radical Right," in Explorations in Rhetorical Criticism, pp. 124-137. Leathers follows the lead of psychologist Milton Rokeach to argue that Birchers and other reactionaries are "psychologically incapable of resisting and the nonreactionary audience experientially incapable of contesting the reactionary message." (p. 134). The author and Leathers disagree with respect to the precise applicability of Rokeach's closed-mindedness thesis. Rokeach posits that the open- or closed-mind is characterized by three regions: the "central" (which consists of one's most central beliefs or values), an "intermediate" (which consists of one's authority beliefs as they derive from the central region), and a "peripheral" region (consisting of beliefs derived from one's authority beliefs). This writer believes that authority beliefs are the key to understanding Birchism, whereas Leathers seems to prefer a general ideological consistency in which "(1) those things in which the reactionary disbelieves are absolutely

and consistently rejected; (2) there is almost complete isolation between those things in which the reactionary believes and those in which he disbelieves; and (3) the reactionary is unable to distinguish between beliefs opposed to his own." (p. 127). This is so, primarily I think, when the leader-follower relationship of the authoritarian character permits. See Milton Rokeach, The Open- and Closed-Mind (New York: Basic Books, 1960), pp. 39-51.

[6]Fred W. Grupp, "Personal Satisfaction Derived from Membership in the John Birch Society," Western Political Quarterly, 24 (1971), 79-83 and "The Political Perspectives of Birch Society Members" in The American Right Wing ed. Robert A. Schoenberger (Atlanta: Hol, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), pp. 83-118. Grupp's survey indicates that 62% joined for "ideological reasons" (only 21% found such satisfaction), 18% "to associate with like-minded people" (19% found it), 11% "to become informed" (16% found it), and 8% "for political commitment" (36% found this). Unfortunately, and surprisingly, Grupp failed to ask about other factors more closely associated with the present essay. Nevertheless it appears that those seeking ideological benefits (a la Leathers) were disappointed, and that people received more political activity than they had bargained for during this early period. Thus a decline in visible political activity and an increase in introspective ideological explanations, such as may have occurred since 1966, is quite consistent with what we know of member interest in Birchism.

[7]Bennett, 735-749.

[8]Rokeach, pp. 15-16.

[9]See Abraham Maslow, "The Authoritarian Character Structure," Journal of Social Psychology, 18 (1943), 401-411; Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (New York: Avon Library, 1965); and T.W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford, The Authoritarian Personality (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950).

[10]These characteristics are derived primarily from the article by Maslow and, secondarily, from Fromm whose major contribution is the sado-masochistic emphasis.

[11]Maslow, p. 403.

[12]Maslow, p. 403.

[13]Maslow, p. 404.

[14]Maslow, p. 406.

[15]Maslow, pp. 407-408.

[16]Maslow, p. 408.

displayed too much bravado in an encounter with a Chinese Communist officer. Welch regards Birch as the first casualty in the final struggle against the Communists.

[37]BBJBS, p. 34.

[38]Robert Welch, The Politician (Belmont, Massachusetts: Belmont Publishing, 1963), see esp. p. 279.

[39]As early as the 1958 organizational session Welch strongly supported Goldwater's candidacy (see BBJBS, p. 109). But he believed that the conspiracy had the political process rigged so as to prevent his election. For his part, Goldwater was not a Welch supporter. After reading The Politician Goldwater "urged him not to print it. I said I couldn't accept his theory that Ike was either a dunce and a dupe or a conscious sympathizer. Most of the John Birchers are patriotic, concerned, law-abiding, hardworking and productive. There are a few whom I call Robert Welchers, and these are the fanatics who regard everyone who doesn't totally agree with them as communist sympathizers." Barry Goldwater, With No Apologies (New York: William Morrow, 1979), p. 119.

[40]BBJBS, pp. 20, 17, 28, and 60.

[41]BBJBS, p. 61.

[42]BBJBS, p. 162.

[43]BBJBS, p. 162.

[44]BBJBS, p. 72.

[45]Welch's utopia is a highly individualistic society epitomized by his slogan, "Less Government and More Responsibility" (BBJBS, p. 117). The problem with government, he says, is neither its quality nor its form, but its quantity: the increasing quantity of government in all nations has constituted the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century" (BBJBS, p. 123). If the authoritarian conceives of life as taking place in a jungle, then government represents civilization -- which quantitatively distorts the natural order of survival.

[46]BBJBS, p. 149.

[47]BBJBS, p. 149.

[48]BBJBS, pp. 114 and 115.

[49]BBJBS, pp. 166-167.

[17]Maslow, p. 407.

[18]Maslow, pp. 410-411.

[19]Maslow, pp. 409-410.

[20]Robert H. W. Welch, Jr., The Blue Book of the John Birch Society (Belmont, Massachusetts: Western Islands, 1961), referred to hereafter as "BBJBS".

[21]BBJBS, p. x.

[22]BBJBS, p. 1.

[23]BBJBS, p. 19.

[24]BBJBS, p. 21.

[25]BBJBS, p. 60.

[26]BBJBS, p. 61.

[27]BBJBS, p. 147.

[28]BBJBS, p. 146.

[29]BBJBS, pp. 146-147.

[30]BBJBS, p. 147.

[31]BBJBS, p. 147.

[32]BBJBS, p. 149.

[33]BBJBS, p. 151.

[34]BBJBS, p. 172.

[35]BBJBS, p. 172.

[36]Welch's account of Birch's life is presented in The Life of John Birch (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1954). A more informative and slightly more objective treatment is James Hefley and Marti Hefley, The Secret File on John Birch (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1980). By either account Birch was a fundamentalist Baptist missionary in China who became involved in American intelligence operations during World War II. Despite his compatriots' efforts to restrain him, Birch seems to have